



ASARECA highlights key agro research results

COMESA's CAADP Pillar IV lead partner, the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) has highlighted key agro research results achieved in 2008 during its 6th Board of Directors' meeting held in Entebbe, Uganda, from 6-8 April 2009.

The achievements include the development of improved planting materials of cassava and sweet potatoes which are resistant to various stem, root and leaf diseases; the development of nine proven varieties of quality protein maize; and the conclusion of research work on drought tolerant genetic engineered maize.

The developments will benefit millions of smallholder farmers in the COMESA region, once seed harmonization regulations now under preparation come into effect and allow for more expanded trade in the seed sector. The improved varieties will raise agricultural productivity and mitigate regional food insecurity.

The expanded ASARECA Board of Directors' meeting, which now includes COMESA, the East African Farmers Federation, Universities Forum, the Regional Agribusiness Network, NGOs, CG Centres and Extension Services, was officially opened by Uganda's Agricultural State Minister, Honourable Henry Bagire.

Development Partners in attendance included United States Agency for International Development, European Commission, Canadian International Development Agency and the World Bank.

During the meeting, the development partners signed a US\$24 million Grant Support to ASARECA as an initial amount of the ASARECA Trust Fund which will run up to 2013 and will reach well over US\$50 million.

Additionally, ASARECA will provide technical back up to the regional centres of research excellence being established in Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Uganda at a total of US\$120 million from the World Bank.

Governments in Southern Africa endorse Conservation Agriculture as a pathway to food security

Permanent Secretaries and directors of agriculture in Southern Africa, farmers unions, researchers and representatives from AU-NEPAD, COMESA and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have renewed their commitment to support farmers in their efforts to use Conservation Agriculture (CA) as an avenue for increasing agricultural productivity.

This was during a three-day regional CA tour that took place in Zambia from April 6-8 2009.

Officially opening the tour, Zambian Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Bernard Namachila noted that experiences from pilot CA projects in Zambia and Zimbabwe had shown increased access to food by those that practice it.

"This in turn has reduced their dependence on food markets and has increased their resilience to weather and socio-economic related shocks," he said.

Mr. Namachila was joined by Dr. Nouredin Mona, the FAO Representative in Zambia, Martin Bwalya of AU-NEPAD, Jarvis Zimba of the Zambia National Farmers' Union, Jim Barnhart of USAID-Zambia, Charlotta Norrby of the Swedish Embassy, Imakando Moosho of the Royal Norwegian Embassy-Zambia, African Permanent Secretaries of agriculture and department directors and delegates from regional research organisations, farmers, and development agencies.

The tour was aimed at increasing the uptake of CA in the region by creating awareness among government and regional decision makers. At the meeting, Zambia was recognized as being a regional leader in the field.

Speaking at the same occasion, Dr. Mona said it was time for the region to look critically at an approach such as CA which recognizes that, proper and efficient use of land and water resources is cardinal for sustainable farm productivity.

And Martin Bwalya, the Lead Specialist on the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme's (CAADP) project on sustainable land and water management at AU-NEPAD said that some of the contributing factors to the low uptake of CA in the region include limited awareness of the relevant technologies, limited sharing of documented evidence on CA and limited or lack of supportive policies, research, extension and resources capacity.

"We are working with various Regional Economic Communities, such as COMESA, research institutions, partners and national decision makers to make sure that we have the political will to revitalize agriculture in Africa as is laid out in CAADP," he said.

In southern Africa, few countries have adopted CA as part of their agricultural programming policy and strategy despite the potential benefits. Unlike conventional farming practices, conservation agriculture (CA), is aimed at attaining food security at the household level by minimizing soil disturbance, maintaining a permanent soil cover and practicing crop rotations.

When these are practiced together with other good agronomic practices it is possible to increase yields significantly. Labour or fuel costs are reduced dramatically by moving away from ploughing. Fertilizer and moisture are used more efficiently by concentrating them where they are needed by the crops.



COMESA to promote safer trade in livestock products

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) aims to promote safer trade in livestock and products of animal origin, in order to enhance the contribution of the livestock sector to economic development in the region.

This was reaffirmed during a regional workshop held in Nairobi, Kenya, to address issues relating to trade and trans-boundary animal diseases in the Horn of Africa.

The workshop, which was jointly organised by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the European Commission (EC) and COMESA, discussed issues of stabilization of regional export markets for livestock and products of animal origin and support to pastoral livelihoods in the lowland areas of the Horn of Africa. In addition, the workshop considered issues regarding export trade to the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East.

The workshop was attended by more than 50 delegates, who included chief veterinary officers of the Horn of Africa Nations, namely, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Sudan, as well as representatives from Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Oman and Yemen. Also in attendance were representatives from the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the Inter _ Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the East Africa Community (EAC), NGOs, donor/partner organizations, livestock traders and quarantine station operators and private veterinarians.

Officially opening the workshop, Kenyan assistant Minister for Livestock Development, Hon. Aden Duale, underscored the need to improve the incomes and enhance the food security situation of the livestock dependent households. He also called for putting in place effective livestock systems, as well as appropriate disease management systems, so as to elevate the livestock sector to its rightful place in social and economic development particularly in the Horn of Africa.

The acting director of the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources, Dr. Ahmed Elsawalhy, called for a co-ordinated approach to animal disease control to ensure safe trade with appropriate levels of risk. He stated that AU-IBAR stood ready to work with member States and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in addressing trans-boundary animal diseases with a view to enhancing both domestic and export trade.

The deputy director of USAID/East Africa, Mr. Larry Meserve, also made a statement expressing USAID's continued commitment and support to regional livestock programmes being implemented by such organisations as COMESA, EAC and IGAD.

Speaking at the same function, director of Investment Promotion and Private Sector Development at the COMESA Secretariat, Dr. Chungu Mwila, noted that poor livestock services, such as inefficient production, marketing and distribution systems are some of the major limiting factors to regional and export markets. He observed that it was essential for regional organisations, such as COMESA, to put in place appropriate disease management interventions in support of both domestic and export trade.

During the three-day workshop, COMESA SPS expert, Dr. Bruce Mukanda made three technical presentations, on "The Application of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) to Livestock Trading Systems", "The COMESA Green Pass as a Strategy for Harmonising SPS Measures" and "SPS and Animal Health".

The livestock specialist, Dr. Dawit Abebe, made a presentation on "Pastoral Livelihoods and Vulnerability in the Horn of Africa." The essence of the presentations, which were well received by the delegates, was to illustrate the usefulness of sciences and evidence-based approaches to addressing issues of trade and trans-boundary and animal diseases.

COMESA is currently implementing a livestock and pastoralist programme with the financial support from USAID known as the "Regional Enhanced Livelihoods in Pastoral Areas."

Working together with member States, COMESA is in the process of developing a long-term strategy for livestock development to take advantage of the huge global livestock market.